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AIRGRAM

A-695 NO.

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RIVAN ANALYSIS & DISTRIBUTION BRANCH

648

TO : Department of State

INFO : Amman, Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, Jidda, London, Paris

FROM : AmEmbassy Beirut

DATE: February 26, 1965

SUBJECT: Current French Efforts in Lebanon

REF : CA-8895 of March 4, 1964.
Embassy's A-527 of January 6, 1965.

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SUMMARY

French initiatives continue waxing in Lebanon, although it is still impossible to gauge their tangible results.

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As a postscript to the Embassy's A-527, which reported increasing French initiatives in Lebanon, the Embassy notes the following further French efforts in Lebanon:

(1) Visit of Count du Chayla. Count Armand du Chayla visited Lebanon for several weeks in January and February, very likely under orders from the French Government. This popular and highly polished French diplomat was the first French ambassador to Lebanon following Lebanese independence. His popularity with the Lebanese was so great that a Beirut stadium, among other things, was named after him.

Du Chayla's visit included attendance at a great number of social functions, giving lectures, and calls on Lebanese dignitaries. His approach to gaining friends in Lebanon is reflected in his well-received talk before the Lebanese Cenacle, a Francophile cultural organization, in which he called Lebanon an "oasis of friendship in a sea of indifference", a "Switzerland of the Middle East" and "a country which, had it not existed, would have had to be invented." A Lebanese listener was overheard commenting, "He is extremely intelligent."

Group 3 - Downgraded at 12 year intervals, not automatically declassified.

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Drafted by: POL:GNAnderson:bc 2/25/65

Contents and Classification Approved by: Mr. Mak

Clearances:

(2) Helou Visit to Paris. As reported in the Embassy's A-559 of January 15, 1965, President Charles Helou has accepted General DeGaulle's invitation to visit France from May 5 to May 7, 1965. The press continues to play up this visit, speculating that it will herald a great new era in French-Lebanese relations. Prime Minister Haj Hussein OWEINI is currently in Paris undergoing medical treatment and is reportedly at the same time preparing the way for Helou's visit (Oweini, incidentally, chose Paris over Walter Reed Hospital for his current treatment, although he may still wish to be treated at Walter Reed in the future).

(3) Rumored Lebanese Request for French Military Aid. Recent Beirut newspaper reports have indicated Lebanese Government interest in acquiring French military equipment, including Mirage aircraft. Foreign Minister Takla confirmed recently that Lebanon had indeed approached the French concerning the acquisition of Mirages (see Embtel 843). While Takla gave the impression that discussions had been limited to Mirages and had not progressed very far, it is entirely possible that there is more to the matter than meets the eye.

For the Ambassador:

Dayton S. Mak

Dayton S. Mak
First Secretary of Embassy